

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: LANE L. LIDDLE
INTERVIEWER: THOMAS JENOLEWICZ
DATE: MAY 20, 1988**

**T = THOMAS
L = LANE**

SG-NA-T028

Interview begins with Thomas in mid-sentence:

T: . . .Mr. Lane Liddle. My name is Thomas Jenolewicz. We're interviewing 79 Emerald Lane in the Spruces in Williamstown. And today is May 20, 1988.

Good Evening. Um, I would just like to start talking a little bit about your [tape fades out]. Tell me where and when you were born.

L: Well, I was born in Burlington, Iowa. And I grew up in Davenport, Iowa. [Radio or TV playing in background] And let me see, I was about twenty-five and I got itchy feet and I started bumming around. When I met my girl over here in North Adams, I got hitched and of course there I stayed. So I lived in Williamstown for most of the time. I worked for about eighteen years or so for the Cornish Wire. And um, I got fired from there. I got fired because I wouldn't teach a man a certain job. When the boss says "by God you will teach him," I says, "by God I won't." So when I went to Sprague's they wanted to know where I'd worked. And I told them in the Cornish Wire. They wanted to know why I got through. And I told them just what I've said now. And they says, "oh, working conditions unsatisfactory." So that's what went on my record. I worked in the maintenance there as a welder. I did gas welding and mostly electric welding. But ah, it was really interesting. It was a good bunch of fellows to work with. The pays weren't very high. In fact I think, well they couldn't compare with the GE. But I had had a cancer out. And when I went to go to the GE, they found out I had had a cancer out, and they wouldn't hire me. So I knew the boss of the maintenance in Sprague's, and he asked me if I wanted a job. So I said, "sure." So I says, "but you don't pay enough." He says, "well I'll give you top pay." I forget just what it was then, but I said, "okay." So there I stayed for twenty-two and a half years.

T: I'll ask you a little bit more about that in a little while. [Sound of television in background]

T: I'd like to go back to your childhood growing up in Davenport. What was it like?

L: Well, it was right on the banks of the Mississippi, Davenport is. And we, I learned to swim in a little creek, about two foot deep. But then afterwards, after we grew up more, I was about four years old then, and after we grew up till about eleven we went to the YMCA all the time and learned to swim better. Later when we was about twelve to fourteen years old we'd swim across the Mississippi. And if we didn't want to swim back the ferry would bring us back. The ferryman was a very good man. Now if we was in his line of going he'd swing way down around us. He was really good.

T: You swam all the way across the Mississippi?

L: Oh yes. From Davenport to Rock Island. The current there was about five miles an hour. So we didn't swim straight across. Well we swam straight across, but the current would carry us down. And we'd land about two blocks down from where we started. My older brother was a much better swimmer. And there used to be across the river race there every year. My older brother would always come in first, another fellow second, and I'd come in third. And then we'd go and race down to Burlington, Iowa and Fort Madison, Iowa. And I've swum the Mississippi at Montrose, Iowa where it's a mile and a half wide. Sometimes the waves get pretty high there. And I got a canoe one time. And my young brother and I, he was nine years younger than I was, we was going from Davenport down to Montrose to my grand dad's, and we had a kitten with us. Well we got down by Muscateen, which is about twenty-eight miles down, and we was going to camp on the big sand bar. I don't know how dumb people can get, but we found out. Because it started to rain, so we turned a canoe over and got under it. The kitten was dry, it was up on the seats, you know. But then the rain splashing in on us. I looked at my young brother, and I says, "what are you doing?" He says, "I'm going to keep the rain out." He's scooping the sand up and packing it up to the canoe. [coughs] Well the upshot was we got down about two inches below the level of the river. So we laid in water all night long. Boy, [laughs] I'm telling you we froze. But that was all right. We had a good trip that time. Another time I went down by myself, another fellow was going to go with me, he was going to head for New Orleans. But it was too late in the fall. He wouldn't go. So I says I'll go alone. Well it was way too late, because if you're quit paddling the wind would blow you up the river. A couple of times it blew me over into the shore to driftwood and I just couldn't get away from it. So I'd have to get off and pull the canoe up and stay there till the next day. The last night though, I was on the Illinois side and all I could see from Montrose was a little bulb in a little one horse depot. So I started paddling for that. And I was scared. I didn't think I was going to make it that night, because waves would come up over both ends of the canoe, or both ends would be out of the water. And was I froze when I got there to my Grand Dad's. I couldn't talk straight. I just stammered. I'll tell you.

Now one other time above that though it was windy and I tried to, I was in the [lee?] of an island. The bank was about four, or five feet high, straight up and down. I could not land. So I paddled across to where there was some summer camps. And I pulled the canoe up. The camps were up on stilts. And I pulled the canoe up, turned it over underneath the stilts, got my blankets and went to sleep. Pretty soon I had to wake up. Dog gone little mice was in the blankets with me. [Both laugh] And they must have played hide-and-go-seek all night long. They come up my back. I'd be on my side, they'd come up my back, keep poking their head under my arm.

You raise your arm up, over they'd go down around your feet again. But I made it all right. But the waves, that was a bad time though, because two men drowned that had been duck hunting. The waves were too big for their boat and that. But that was all right. Son-of-a-gun. But I had a lot of fun. I used to swim. Every summer I spent down at my Grand Dad's at Montrose. And uh, we'd go fishing. He's always catch more fish than I would. Yup. And when we'd go up the creek to [sane] for minnows, I always had to take the deep end into the pool, and he'd stand almost ankle deep is all. But we had a lot of fun doing it. And I'd swim. There at Montrose there's a back water from the [Cuquid?] Dam. Goes up about thirty miles. And he would let me swim and he road the boat along side of me. I liked that every summer. But I don't know, after I got older, I got [Brites?] Disease. And I had to be in bed all except an hour in the morning, an hour in the afternoon. And a friend of mine, his mother went to the Chiropractic school, was taking up the Chiropractic. She was uh, send word down, wanted to know if I wanted to take adjustments. So I said, "sure." Well he almost had to carry me up to his house and then back again. After two months I went back to the doctor. Doctor says, "well you haven't got a sign of it, what you been doing?" I told him I was talking adjustment. He got made. He didn't believe in Chiropractic at all. He was a medical doctor. But he was an old timer. But then my Dad got, worked for the Rock Island Railroad and they sent him to Schenectady to inspect the boilers while he was building more engines. Well I came over then and I got a job in the General Electric. And after awhile his boilers were built, he went home and I stayed working in the General Electric.

And then I got to thinking, gee, I didn't want to stay that way all the time, laboring. So I wanted to take the welding course. Well the superintendent there in that building wouldn't let me take it. He said, wait a year or two, take it here. Well I didn't know what to do. So I, there was a Mr. Frame in American Locomotive Works had given me a letter to get the job in the first place. So I says, well I'd see if I could go see if he could do anything for me. And I told him I was going to go up to see Mr. Frame. And he says, "oh, you'll never get to see him." Well I went up. The secretary wanted to know what I wanted and I told her I wanted to see him about the General Electric. She showed me right into his office. And he was with another businessman and he talked to me just like my father would. He says uh, "you take it, you take your welding." And he said, "you know, in a couple of months they'll be a lay-off." That was in '29, just, the big lay-offs were coming from the depression.

T: Was this before or after the stock market crash?

L: Hm?

T: Was this before or after the stock market crash?

L: Just before the crash. It was just before. But I guess they knew it was coming. And um, oh, when I told the superintendent I was going to see Mr. Frame about taking it, well Mr. Frame told me, he says, "you go back and tell him you quit." And turn in your tools, Monday you go over to the welding school. Well I told the superintendent, I says, "I quit." He say, "you do, what are you going to do?" I says, "I'm going to the welding school." He looked at me and I said, "well Mr. Frame said to tell you I quit and then Monday go over to the welding school." "Oh", he said. Well Mr. Frame was a self-made man. He started out as a boy heating rivets in that American Locomotive Works. And when I ever saw him he was president of the place. I got my welding

course there. And then when I got through there, I come up (--) A fellow I met named George Patterson lived in Bridgeville. He got through before I did and he got a job down in Pittsfield in the GE. So I came up to see if I could get a job, and I did. Well I stayed there until work got so bad that we'd only working two days a week. So I told the boss, I says, "well I'm going to quit." He says, "well you can get by on two days, can't you?" I says, "yes, I can." But I says, "there's a lot of married men that need to work more than I do." So I quite and I went back to Iowa.

Well I stayed there a couple of years and then I come back. I came back again and I got a job in a bakery over in North Adams. I was renting this bakery. Just old timers might remember that one. And um, well I'd met a girl over home and we got engage in the meantime. But in the meantime while I'm over here she found somebody else. So what. I had a bicycle then and I used to ride up by [Mosset's?] pond. I had a little camp up there, a little one room place for the summer. Otherwise in the winter I roomed in the YMCA. Well my Dad was a, my mother and my Dad, father were divorced. And my Dad always wanted to go to the Ozarks. So I says, "well I'll go home and go to the Ozarks with my Dad." Well I road the bicycle and from North Adams to Davenport Iowa. I got home, he wasn't going to the Ozarks. He was just getting married again. So there I stayed.

T: How long did it take you to ride from North Adams to Davenport?

L: Eleven, eleven days.

T: Eleven days.

L: Yeah.

T: That was when the bicycles were all those big balloon tires. You really had to ride it then. But it was a lot of fun. I had some experiences on that too. I know why I stopped in Warsaw, New York for supper. I had my supper in a little restaurant. Went to the edge of town and camped out. Next morning I goes back to the restaurant. A couple of fellows come in while I was washing up. Went and had my breakfast. Went to pay them, I had no money. I think those two fellows picked my pocket there. I had about thirty cents in my pocket then. The restaurant man I think knew what happened. And he says, "well that's all right." I says, "well you might as well have the thirty cents, it won't do me any good." "I might as well go broke." Yup. So I did. But I made it all right home. And when I come back another time, (--) No that (--) This was the time I went in to the bakery then. And when I got through at the bakery I went bumming down through the south. And um, well I was hopping freight trains and everything, and just going hungry too. There'd be as many as fifty on a freight train then riding the rails.

I got down to Dallas, Texas, they was building a building, the first building about that was ever welded. That's why I went to Dallas. Well they had al the help they needed. So I didn't get a job, but I was hungry. This is a funny one. I went to the YMCA to see if I could get something to eat. They had a cafeteria. Well one girl I asked, she says, "well the head lady isn't here right now, you'll have to wait till she comes." Okay, I waited. Pretty soon one of the waitresses come up and she says, "well here I'm, this is, tomorrow's payday and I'm broke, but here's a dime and a Dallas Street car token. Maybe you can get a cup, a cup of coffee for it." Okay. No, two dimes it was, and a penny. I'll never forget that penny. Well the lady came by and I asked her and she says, "well we're not suppose to feed anybody, but I guess it's case of

necessity." So they took me up and put me behind where they served the food and started feeding me. The girls had come up [unclear] spoke like northern, they're southern you know, I guess they like to hear me talk too. Well anyway she'd chase them away. "Go on away, leave him eat, he's hungry." Well pretty soon the head lady come up and give me what I thought was a dollar bill. But it was two one dollar bills all crumbled up together. And on the way out the first girl that give me the two dimes and a nickel and a token, she says, "here, I borrowed this from one of the girls." She give me a dollar. Well I was going up the street in Dallas and boy I began getting sick. Oh I was getting so sick. Well finally a colored fellow there at a big double doors place, he says, "what's a matter boy, are you sick?" I said, "yeah, I don't feel good." "Well come on in and see the doctor." I says, "I can't see no doctor." "Come on there boy," he says. He dragged me in. The doctor came out and I told him I had eaten too much. Well he sat me on the chair and a pan on the floor, and he gives me a pint of some milky like stuff to drink. I guess he wanted me to get rid of everything. Well I drank it, nothing happened. He gives me a half a pint of some pink stuff then. I took a little sip or two and I begin to faint away. And he, boy he straightened me up. He slapped me on the face you know, and he straightened you up. And then he says, gulp it down. I gulped it down and I still couldn't do anything. I says, "can I lay down?" He says, "yes, maybe that will do it." Took me into a little room where there was a hospital bed and he told me, "lay there." And he says, there's a washroom right across the hall. He put the pan on the floor. I didn't lay a half a minute I don't think till I lost all my good supper. [T: Laughs] It was all gone. Well in the morning, well he come in some time during the night and wanted to know if I felt well enough to go home. I told him, I says, "I can't go home, my home is in Iowa." Well he says, "we'll see." Next time I work up it was daylight. Went across the hall, washed up, took off. They never asked me my name or anything. But boy, I'm telling you I felt better.

T: When was this about that you were in Dallas? [T: Hm?] When?

L: Oh that was about 1930. About 1930. It was after the market crash there, when things were tough. There used to be, well going out of Dallas there would be oh, fifty to one hundred people on the freight trains. And I know they'd go into freight yard and get the dispatcher and see which train was going where and where to get it. And I know we, a bunch of us started getting on the train, a brakeman come along, he says, "get the hell off of there! Can't you wait until the guy gets out of sight? And we did. We got off. When he went by we got on again. I'll have to tell you it was, there was a lot of things. Then they kept, well the next place I stopped was in Mexico, Missouri. And I got a little, a job in a boarding house. And I stayed there for about two weeks. There was no pay to it. Just your keep. So one day I was to take some letters down to the Post Office and I just kept right on going then. And I got into Mexico, Missouri. And just before that, Mexico, I changed tires for a couple of ladies. And they give me fifty-cents. Well I was rich then. So when I got into Mexico, I went into the restaurant to get something to eat. Two fellows come in that had been hunting. One had a rabbit, the other had a squirrel. And they says, "here, maybe you can get somebody to cook one of these, if you, and if you give them the other one." Well the restaurant guy wouldn't do it. I didn't know where to go. I met a young colored fellow then on the street. Asked him if he knew anybody. "Well, he says, you go down to such and such a house down there and maybe she will." Well I knocked on the door and there was the oldest little old lady came to the door. She was just like a mummy. And I asked her and she said, "yes, come on in." Well she had been washing in her dishes. And that frying pan she

was scouring with sand. Everything in that house was just spic and span, but it was real old and ragged. The quilt on the bed was all ragged, but I couldn't ask for a cleaner one. The chairs were all held together with wire. Well I went in. First thing you know, this young fellow come to the back door. And she wanted to know which one I wanted. I says, "well give me the squirrel. The rabbit is bigger for you and your husband." And he was older than she was. And he sat in the chair all the time. They looked just like a couple of mummies, they were so old. Well she fried the rabbit, or the squirrel for me and some potatoes. And boy was that good. I've never tasted any better. I asked her where she learned to cook. She said, oh her white missy taught here when she was a slave girl. So that's, she was pretty old then.

So uh, then I went on and got into Montrose where my aunt and grandmother lived. She says, next morning she says, "what do you want for breakfast?" I says, pancakes. You know I ate thirteen pancakes. And I couldn't look a pancake in the face after that for years. I just ate too many of them. Well when I went bumming down through the south I got into Raleigh, North Carolina. I'd met a young fellow, he had come from New York. He was broke. Everybody we met was broke. But in my pack, I had a pack with me with clothes and I had about seventy dollars in the pack too. Enough to see me, I figured to see me through. Well got in Raleigh, North Carolina we went up in the town to see it. That was the capital of North Carolina. So we went up to see the town. And I left my pack at the railroad commissary store there. Well I had seventy-two cents in my pocket. That's what I ended up with. When we come back, train was going out was the one we'd been waiting for. Young fellow says, "well he was going to get it." I says, "I can't, my pack is on the other side of the train." Well he hopped the train. And I says, what the heck, he's been going broke from New York, I can too. So I hopped the train. I took the seventy-two cents though and I bought postcards so I can write home to my folks and let them know I was all right, and where I was and that. So that was all right. When I got home, well I took one card and I wrote back to the commissary store wanting to know if they'd send it up to my home in Davenport. And if they would, or if they would keep it until I could send the money for the postage. When I got home the package was there. The seventy-two dollars was in it. Everything was all wrapped up in heavy wrapping paper. They did a beautiful job. But uh, I don't know. It was quite an experience.

I was into box cars one time some place and the train all at once the breaks went on. We was in the back of the car and when we got through sliding we was up to the front of the car. You know. I got into Atlanta, Georgia and two other fellows and myself was on that train and we was next to the coal tender. I kept telling him, I says we're too close to the engine, let's go back. We made a stop one time, I says, "well I'm going back, come on back. Well they'd come back the next stop. The next stop was going into the Atlanta, George freight yards. And the fellow off the right away, they were going maybe fifteen, twenty miles an hour is all. Fellow off the right away says, "jump, jump, there's two dicks up there. They got two fellows." I jumped all right. Going through Atlanta George I saw about three gangs on chain gangs. Those two fellows got on to it too. Well I met a young fellow in Atlanta then. We spent by a warehouse. The next morning the train was going by, we was going to get it. So I run and I jumped. You always get the front end of a freight car, never the back. Because if the breaks your hold it'd swing you right in between, run over you. Well I jumped and I got it. And I hung on. I got it. Stepped over to the next car, which was a tanker, and I looked back the young fellow, he's running. He jumped. He grabbed, broke his hold. He went rolling away. Well I was just ready to drop off and I says, oh by gosh they'll pick me up too. Right on the other side of the tracks was a busy [unclear] in Atlanta. I says, they'll want to know where I live and they'll put me on the chain

gang. I says, I can't do him any good. And he'd just got off of a chain gang. And around his ankles was about two inches of just scabs all the way around. He worked, he drove on the dump wagon and they'd chain him with an ankle chain around his ankle onto the wagon. Now I often wonder what happened to him. But when I got home my Dad says "well, I guess you had about a thousand dollars worth of experience didn't you?" I says, "yup, but I just assume have the thousand dollars? I says, "boy, I don't know."

I'd always been sickly and always had to be in by nine o'clock unless I went to the "Y", then it was 9:15. Well I always told them my older brother could be out. Whenever he wanted to come home, he'd come home. I always told my folks, I says, "when I'm twenty-one I'm going to do what I want." Well I was twenty-one when I come through up from bumming. We had about sixty-three steps up to the house. So I started going. I was half way up and I'd sit there. And I'd sit there. Twelve o'clock come and I'd go in the house and go to bed. The third night my mother give me heck. I didn't say nothing. I sat there that night. Then she told my Dad. My Dad give me heck. I says, "look, if I can't do what I want I can go right back out on the road." "Well okay," he says then. And I said and I'll tell you where I was. I was half way up the steps. He says, "oh, working your points huh?" I says, "yup." [Chuckles]

But then when I came back and I got the job in Renton's Bakery, I met my wife while I was there. My job down there was making donuts and wrapping them.

T: Just for a second, when, when would this be? Would this be still during the thirties, or?

L: That'd be about 1932 I think. While I was home though I got a job in a LaPlante [unclear] Company. Well first in their Illinois oil company made fuel tanks for homes and that, and gas stations. Then when that peetered out, I got a job up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa at the Laplante [unclear] Company building wagons and stuff for the caterpillar tractors. And then I quit there and went back to the Illinois Oil Company. And there was a Polish boss, a red head. Oh was he, he started bulling out, you'd hear him for a block. [T: Chuckles] Well he give us an old torch, I and another welder there. Says, "you fix it up and if anybody tries to get it, break their arm." Well two days later when I goes in, we worked nights, a fellow comes up, took my torch. I says, "that's mine." "Well he said to take this torch and use it." I says, "okay." I packed up and I went home. Next time they come in he started to jump me and I wasn't going to take it. I told him "look, I says, you said to break anybody's arm after we got these torches fixed." "No we didn't!" I says, "yes you did!" And I called the other welder. He says, "you sure did!" And he started yelling around. I said, he said, "well you wanted last night off, you better take tonight off." I says, "no way." "Well you better take tonight off anyway!" I says, "no sir, I'm all done." I says, "when do I get my pay?" Well he said, "you'll have to wait till payday." I says, "payday?" That was on a Wednesday. I says, "payday I'll be in North Adams, Massachusetts." "Send my check to the YMCA." So I went. I was there and that noontime the check came. So son-of-a gun. I don't know. Its been quite a mix up. Quite a lot of fun.

T: So then you came back here and you were working the bakery and you met your wife?

L: Yeah, I met my wife when I worked in Renton's Bakery. And then I went home, and she was here. But then after I got through, when I quit the Illinois Oil Company, I went home and told my mother, "I'm going back to North Adams." Well that's when I came back and I got a job in the Cornish Wire. And um, son-of-a-gun I was good. That was during the war. I worked there all during the war.

T: So you didn't, you didn't go over seas? You didn't fight?

L: Hm?

T: You didn't fight in the war. You stayed over here.

L: No. Everytime my number about come up they gave me a deferment. I know the last time I told the boss, "I don't want these deferments." That's all right. I went over to the draft board and asked them how to get away from it. He says, "quit your job and in thirty days we draft you." I says, "what do I live on for thirty days?" So they had me. But I did join the State Guard then. And all we were good for was rifle fire, or something in case we were invaded. Our job was to slow them up till the army could get there. That's all. So. But I worked in the Cornish. I [unclear] 91 1/2 hours one week working, and boy I was tired. I'd work every night. It wore me down. Finally I told my boss, I says, "I've had it, I'm going home for a vacation." "No, no, you won't come back." I says, "yes, I'll come back, but I've got to get rested." Well at that time they paid you the vacation pay of the week that you worked before. Well I worked that 91 1/2 hours that week. So when I went home for a week I stayed two and a half weeks. And I got paid that 91 1/2 hour rate all the time I was out. Yes sir, he was the best boss I ever had. He was some man. Yes sir, he was quite a man. Well if anybody called him up at two, three o'clock in the morning and said their oil burner quit going, he'd get up and go and fix it. And he come from church one time, two of the fellows was working in the boiler there and they couldn't get [unclear]. He peeled off his coat, went in, he took it out for him. He said, he told him, he said, "you'll get it all dirty!" He says, "the cleaners will take it out." Yeah, but he was a heck of a good boss. Yup. And I don't know. There wasn't too many men like him. But he was a mason. And he was the reason that I got interested in masonry too.

We had a, I have a son that's retarded. And I had to take him to the Children's Hospital one time. And I asked him if I could (--) Well I thought I had enough money and I asked him if I could borrow five dollars. Sure. He wanted to know why. And I told him. "That ain't enough!" And he gave me fifty. Yeah. That was, that was Leon all over though. Well I didn't even need it. So when I come back I give it to him. But that was him all over. He was right there to help you. Yeah.

Son-of-a-gun my son had a [unclear] when he was born. The soft spot in the back of the head stuck out some and there was this part of the brain [unclear]. Some called it a whin, but it was, the right thing was a [menengaseal?]. And they, down to Boston they cut the brain, or cut the head about that long. Pushed that back in and sewed it over. The most beautiful stitching job you ever saw. About a quarter inch all the way up of stitches. It was a goo five inch cut. And at that time I guess the hospitals was a little different. When we took him down our doctor over in North Adams, we had taken him to one doctor, oh wait for a year and then take him to Children's Hospital. But instead we was going to take him to this other doctor. "Oh, he's no good. He's only good for accident cases." Well we took him to him anyway. He looked at him. The other doctor says it could be this, or it could be that, or it could be something else. This guy looked at it, "oh that's a menengaseal," he said. Got his book out and showed us what it is. He says, "that's getting awfully thin. If it breaks it'll cause spinal meningitis and that's the end. Said she would get him down to the Children's Hospital. So next day we did enough to make an appointment. The next day we bundled up and went down. Well we got into the hospital and they started

calling around for the doctor. The phone rang. Somebody wanted a room and they says, I haven't got, we've only got three beds, we've got to keep them for emergencies. There was thirty-three hundred beds in that hospital.

Finally they got a hold of the doctor. He was from Albany. Dr. Campbell. And uh, he was getting his coat on to go out when they took him up. And he took one look at him, turned to the nurse, says, "get a bed ready." That was it! And then, well operations now are sky high you know, but at that time you know what they charged me? Five dollars for the operation and fifty cents a day for keeping him. Yes!

T: And when, when was this?

L: That was, well he's forty-nine years old. It was about forty-eight years ago. [T: Hm] Yup. And I told him, I says, "well no matter what they charge me. I says, you can charge me five hundred and I'll pay it, if you give me time." She says, "no, we don't run the hospital that way." I don't know. And people down there were very good. When we come back to get the train somebody there, just good samaritans I think, took us in their car, took us down to the North Station. Everybody was so good to us. But right now the son, he don't talk yet. You can't understand him. But he's working in Saint Joseph's in the kitchen there. And um, he's making a lot of progress. Has his own apartment there. He was in Belchertown for years. All they taught him was how to dress himself. When he got into Flood House on Church Street, and they taught him a heck of a lot. Now he can buy his own clothes. He does his own banking. He gets on a bus, goes to Pittsfield for anything he wants. He's learned so much more here than what he did down in Belchertown. So those half way houses are doing a beautiful job. Yeah. A blessing.

T: Do you have any other children other than your son, or?

L: One daughter. Yup. That's where we're going tomorrow. Up to Montpelier to see my daughter and my three grandchildren. The two grand daughters are married, but the grandson isn't. But we're going up to see them. Yeah. I hope it's good weather. Yeah.

T: We're almost done with this side of the tape. So let's take a minute and take a break.

SIDE ONE ENDS

SIDE TWO BEGINS.

T: Okay. So at the time of your son's operation you were still at the Cornish Wire?

L: Yes. I was there for eighteen years, until I got fired.

T: Would you, would you repeat that story for me? [L: Hm?] Would you repeat that story of how you got fired at Cornish Wire? Would you tell the story again?

L: Did I what?

T: Uh, you told the story earlier, but would you just tell it again?

L: Well they had, I was running what they called an [artose?] machine that measure the wire out and strips the ends. And uh, the young (--) Well Morton, a good boss, he had died. And they had this young fellow. And he wanted, called me in the office, says I want you to teach, I won't say his name, but he was a good fellow. I had nothing against him. And I says, "well I don't know why I should." He says, "by god, you will." And I says, "by god I won't." He says, "well you got to teach him or I'll have to fire you." I says, "all right, when do you want me to get through. Now, tonight? End of week. When?" He says, "well, you'll have to wait till payday, till Friday, or Saturday." Saturday morning they met me at the door and says, "you going to do as I tell you?" I says, "I'm not teaching anybody anything. I says, when do I get my pay?" Well you'll get it payday. That was the next Thursday. I says, okay. Well in the masons (--) Well I had worked nights for a couple of fellows over in North Adams, and they were masons too. And uh, the one fellow was the boss in Sprague's. I told him, I says, "well I got fired today!" Well you want a job? And I told him, "what, where at?" I says, "I've got to go to GE first." Well I had had a cancer out. And uh, the GE wouldn't hire me because of that. So I went and when I come back I says, "yeah, I want a job." Okay. He says, "you'll have to sign a release you know." I says, "okay." So I went up to their doctor. And he says, "you'll have to sign this release." I says, "okay, what is it?" He says, "vericose veins." I never knew I had them. I don't think I have, I don't think I've got them yet. But okay, I signed it. So I worked then for twenty-two and a half years. And when I went there there was one other welder that's worked there too in the welding. And everybody, they made (--) The carpenter's shop was the biggest thing going really, because they had to keep making tables. They made them out of wood you know. And so then when they'd get too loose and that, they'd have to discard them and make another one. Well I kept telling my boss, "why don't you make them out of pipe and ankle iron, and then just put a plywood top on it." Then if you have to change it, take the top off and put (--) You can cut a whole in the knew one to make it. Well he didn't know. Well after awhile, a couple of months afterwards, one of the engineers come down, wanted to [unclear] them. Make it about this size. Well I made it for him. It wasn't what he wanted and they changed it. So um, made it to the change it. And now that wasn't quite it. Made the third one. That's what we want! They were about thirty inches wide and eight foot long. And they could bolt a piece of plywood on it. And if they had to make a cut-out for a machine, okay, they could cut it out. Well we started making tables then. And we'd get orders for as many as fifty at a time. I'll bet we made more than three thousand all together. And uh, well we, they send them to Texas, they send them to Canada. They went all over. And we was working making tables. We was on one order at one time of fifty. And the boss says, "well finish them up before you go home." Well come nine o'clock is when we'd always quit, because we'd go in at seven. Well come nine o'clock the other welder says, "well let's go." I says, "no, he says to finish them." "No, he says, let's go home. I'm going home." I says, "no sir, I'm going to finish these if it takes me all night." Well about one o'clock I finished. I told the watchman when he come through, I says, "I'm going to be laying on that bench over there, because I'm not calling my wife up to come and get me now." Okay. But when he come in, the boss come in, he asked the other welder, "what's he doing here?" He says, "he stayed and finished the tables." "Oh." Well I got me time and a half off it you know, but he never asked, never said to stay and finish a job after that. No way. [Both laugh] That was too much I guess. But uh, well we'd do silver soldering on copper tubings and that. And I know in the research lab they had an outside concern come from Albany I think it was to silver solder the

copper. And almost every joint leaked. They sent me over to patch them up. Well they only had old time torches that just was worn out. I spent a hole morning and I didn't get one leak patched. And the man, the boss in Research, he wanted to know when the heck I'd get done. I says, not as long as these torches work this way. Well after dinner the superintendent, and my boss came over with this other guy and a head electrician. They wanted to know what the matter was. I says, "this is what's the matter." I lit the torch. I got the flame set just right. Turned the hand like that and it's all gone. You couldn't do anything with it. I says, "that's what the hell is the matter with this thing." I says, "you're never going to get it done." The superintendent turned to the head electrician, he says, go down and get a new torch. They went down Shapiro's, come back with a new torch. I had the [unclear] done by that night then. Sure. So just in what you can work with, because some times don't work too good. And I used to have (--) Well the other welder, he wasn't on to his self too much. He was a good guy though. Although he like to stir up trouble. He'd get two guys arguing and then walk away laughing. Well we told him he'd start trouble in an empty barn. Well the big beams went from the basement clear up to the [unclear] were "H" beams, like "H's". And a big water pipe come down in from the roof. Well one got a leak. And the other welder kept trying to get around the back to get that leak, and he couldn't get it. So my boss said, "could you get that leak?" "Yeah, I can get it." Okay. I went up to the pipe. I cut a hole like that in it. Welded it up inside and then welded the piece back in. No leak. I don't think it leaks to this day.

T: Which plant did you work in?

L: All of them.

T: You worked in all the plants.

L: Yeah. I worked up in Beaver, up on Union Street, Brown Street, Marshall Street, and Bennington.

T: So working, working there for twenty-two years what sort of changes did you get in wages, benefits, the working conditions in the plants themselves.

L: Well working conditions really lead up when I kind of asserted myself. They wanted to make some inserts for ovens. And there was about three hundred pieces in that insert. And they plus and minus almost nothing. Well they sent one out to be made. Come back, wouldn't work, couldn't use it. They sent it to another place. Come back, couldn't use it. They give it to this other welder to make one. He made it, couldn't use it. He says, "you try it!" Well I made it. It took me a week to make it. Well they used it. So he says, make another one. Well in the meantime I made all of my spacers so I could clamp them together and that. Well it got so that I could put one together. After everything was cut and straightened I could put it together in a day. Well the boss come up, can't you make them any faster? No. I took a week for each one of them. "Well we got to have them." I says, "can't help it." "Sent them out." Did you send them out three times, they couldn't get them, it wouldn't work. So I said, "send them out." Well from then on they let up on me. They didn't push me so much.

Although one, I had another boss then that came. When my one boss retired this other boss came in. He was riding me an awful lot. I told the other welder, I said, "if he don't cut this out

I'm packing my tools and going home. I'm all done. One more time like this." Well I think he went up to the superintendent of our building, because the fellow was called up on the carpet. And he never road me after that. Yet he was a heck of a good guy. But I'm not going to use names. No.

T: So do you feel you had a good relationship towards the supervisors and the managers, or?

L: I think I've had one of the best relationships. When I retired I think I had about the biggest retirement party of any of the workers had. There were better than a hundred and fifty there. And son-of-a-gun, but uh, and I even got a nice letter from one of the engineers that couldn't be there. He had to be in [Albuquerque?], New Mexico. I got a beautiful letter from him. And everybody seemed to (--) Well I wouldn't do for one what I wouldn't do for another. We had to have a work order to do a welding job. Well the boss come through. We used to do what we called government jobs too you know, for individuals. [T: Hm] Well an order came through, "no more government jobs." Had to have a work order. The very next day my boss brought down a job to do it for this man. "No, where is the work order?" Well this is for R.C. Sprague, he was president of the company. I says, "it's got to have a work order." "Well it's for R.C., for him!" I says, "I can't help it, he's no different with me than anybody else." I says, "you don't want government jobs, I've got to have a work order." Well go ahead and do your government jobs then. So from then on I did the government jobs just the same. [T: Chuckles] But I treated everybody just the same. Fellows that would come from the machine shop. Little five minute job. They didn't have their work order with them. That's okay, I'll do it. Only five minutes. I'd run it into an all day job see. So anything I wanted from the machine shop I got. But some of the other fellows in our group, they couldn't get anything from the machine shop. Yup. But I got whatever I wanted. Because, well one hand paid for the other. You treat them right, they treat you right.

T: So did you have a good relationship with your fellow workers as well as with the managers?

L: Yes, as well as them. Yup. I did one thing one time I should have gotten fired for. A fellow brought a job in to the welding booth, he needed it in a hurry. So I did it. About fifteen minutes. I called him and told him it was ready. Okay, okay. About fifteen minutes more I called him again. Yeah, yeah, he'd come and get it. About fifteen minutes more I says, "if you don't come and get this right away I'll throw it out the window." Well outside my window was a tank just about as big as this room, and it was half full of water, and all [unclear] up. Well he didn't come. Out through the window it went. And I forgot to open the window. [Laughs] [UNCLEAR] After about a half an hour afterwards, "where is it?" He come in after it. I said, "it's out there in that tank, I threw it out the window. I told you I would." He never did get it I don't think. [Both laugh] Yeah. Out the window it went!

But you know, I was quite a bit, all my life a "devil may care". [Unclear], well what the heck. I had a lot of fun. I enjoyed life. I'm seventy-eight now. It's about time I kicked on. Yeah. I have no qualms about dying now. I've done things that I liked. I've always loved masonry. And I've been the Head of The Blue Lodge Chapter [Commandry]. And I've gone with a lot. And how come they give it to me, I don't know. But commandry, there's a Supreme Commander for the United States. They call him the Grand Master of the Commanders. They gave me a Red Cross of color, the Cross of Color anyway. It's the highest honor you can get in masonry

anyplace. And that was last, when we had our conclave for the state. That district man called me up to the podium and they give it to me. And son-of-a-gun, I don't know why? I don't think I earned it, because I never believe in working for medals or anything else. I believed in doing just what you like to do, and the best you can. [T: I see] Yeah, but I'm awful proud of it. Grand Cross of Color, that's it.

T: As you worked over the twenty-two years, did you see, did you see workers wages increasing?

L: Yes, some, not a great deal. Because well, you take thirteen years ago, wages wasn't going up like they are now. [T: Hm] If they got a five cents an hour raise that was pretty good. And it kept, really kept in time, with the times. My brother-in-law, my wife's sister's husband, started working in about 1930, 29 or 30 up in the Beaver. That's all that Sprague's was, just up in the Beaver.

T: Right at the beginning of the company.

L: Yup. And he worked for thirty-five cents an hour. Well at that time I was working over in Rock Island, Illinois for fifty cents an hour welding. Yup. But up there they wanted him to take part of their pay in stock. Well he did. He come out way ahead. Yeah, he did. Umhm.

T: What about union activity during the sixties and during the 1970's?

L: Well I, yeah, I joined the union, because you almost had to.

T: The company union?

L: Hm?

T: The company union? The Sprague union?

L: Well first it was a company union, and then it turned in to the IUE. And uh, the majority had voted it in. I didn't even vote, because I'm not a strong union man. But uh, I joined because a majority of the fellows I worked with in that joined. But I was never active in it and I never would be active in a union. I don't believe in them. I the beginning when it was sweat shops and the boss was king, you had nothing to fall back on, they needed it. Now they're too strong. It's just reversed itself. The union is the boss, not the boss. See. And I don't believe in that at all. When they all ever learn to work together they'll have something, but otherwise, no.

T: What about the strike in 1970? Did you take part in that, or did you [unclear]?

L: No, I was, I was out. I didn't cross the picket lines. But some of them went overboard. They always do. Whenever there's a strike there's always some go overboard, and I, I don't like that kind of thing. Because if I was boss and I owned the factory and a union tried to tell me what to do, I'd say you do what I say or we're closing down. That's just the way I am. I'd say you're all out of work. When you want to play ball with me, okay.

T: Did you see that the strikers, or the people who fought for the unions got a lot out of, out of getting the union, or out of striking? Did they win that many concessions?

L: No, I don't think they won that much. The ones that were active became the stewards and that. And the company couldn't touch them. They're the last to go, or anything. Well they won in that way, but they didn't get anymore money than the rest of them. And uh, another thing is, when they tell you, a union man comes and tells you, "well look what we got, our bargaining agents, look what they got for us." They didn't get it for you. They didn't.

T: The company gave it to you.

L: You're paid (--) That's their business. And you're paying them to do their business. So they're not handing you anything. No, it's all a lot of bologne.

T: So then you worked through until 1973?

L: '73, yes. About '73.

T: And then you retired?

L: At that time you had to retire when you were 65. They'd let you work (--) Well my birthday was on the 18th of September. And they'd let you work till the end of that month that your birthday was on. And I was foolish, because for the last year I refused all overtime. Stupid, because the more you made the better your social security is. I should have grabbed all I could of overtime and it would have boosted up my social security a little.

T: Okay, thank you very much.

L: Yeah, okay.

[Tape is turned off and on again]

L: He got me mad. I ran out the house and I jumped up and down on his bicycle wheel. [phone rings in background]

T: This was your older brother?

L: Yeah. [Laughs] Well about two weeks after that I was making a canoe, and I had all of the frame work done. I got him mad and he ran out and jumped right in the middle of that canoe. And that was the end of that! So, but he was getting even with me. But when he was mad I had to keep out of his way. Boy I would. I'd run all over the neighborhoods where he couldn't find me. But he was the best brother I would ever have. He is. He's a heck of a nice guy. He lives in Worchester, Ohio. My young brother lives down in New York State near Pauling. He just

moved from Pauling. But my older brother, I had my bicycle down to Montrose. That's a hundred, about a hundred and twenty miles from Davenport. And I couldn't afford to ship it home. So he bummed down, got on it, and road it home for me. Because I was, I could never have made it all that way. I was too sickly, and (--) I was fourteen, sixteen before I could ever go barefoot. When I started kindergarten I'd go for an hour, or two hours, or so and then they'd have to take me home sick. I spent a year, a full year at that time it was every half year. And over there your grades like was 1A and 1B, 1B and 1A. The first half was the B half. Then you'd, at mid-term if you passed you went into 1A. You didn't flunk the whole one, the whole grade, just a half a grade, see. Over here you flunk a whole grade. But I (--) I just, just couldn't take it. And I was a poor student, very poor. I never like school after the fourth grade. That's when the war broke, our First World War. And um, I couldn't go out and play. My older brother was rugged, but I couldn't go out and play. So first day of school in the fourth grade, the principal comes in and says, "oh, you've got the little brothers together. Well [unclear] is so much bigger. We better put him up a half a grade, or he'll feel backward being with his young brother." That cured school for me. I never cared about it after that.

T: So how much schooling did you actually have? How long, how long did you stay?

L: [Laughs] That's a toss up. I had nine A, ten B, ten A, eleven B, eleven A, and one twelve B. I was scattered all over the creation there. That son-of-a gun. I just didn't, I just wouldn't work. It wasn't worth working for. And at that time there was no counselors. They didn't have counselors then in school like they do now. You can go and talk it over with them. And in high school the harder I worked in math the less I got. So after the first year I wouldn't work for him anymore. I told him, "I won't work for you." "Well you go back and sit in the corner." I sat in the corner and read library books all the semester. But I couldn't go out for sports, the doctor said no. And because I wouldn't go out for sports, he was the coach, because I wouldn't go out for track and that he kept me down. So, old Coach Day. I'll never forget him. And I quit school twice and I was kicked out once. So I thought I better stay out. And I asked my older brother one time, I says, "what the heck good is the education?" He says, "I'll tell you. He says, that's so you can ball a man out today and he won't realize it till tomorrow." [T: Laughs] That was his definition. But he's been a heck of a guy this guy. He started when he was out of school and was secretary of YMCA [unclear]. He ended up as a cemetery commissioner in Worchester, Ohio. Now he's retired. Now he's on his last legs too I think. Although he sounded good the last time he called. But he's got a cancer in the nose. And it went the other side, then it was going to the brain. So I hope I get to see him before he goes. Umhm. He's been one heck of a good brother.

T: How much older is he than you?

L: One year. One year and fifteen days. Umhm.

T: And what about, what about your younger brother? How much younger?

L: He's about nine years is it Lil? [Lil: Yup] Nine years younger. Umhm. And he and I never could get along. If we was in the same room for five minutes we was fighting. Boy, always fighting. Yet he's a heck of a nice guy too. We get along swell now, you know. We kind of out

grew it I think. And my mother, well she gave me lickins. Boy, not any too many, and not enough I think. But I remember one time when we were both young, my older brother and I, she'd always send us out for our own switch to get switched with. Or we'd come back one time with switches about six inches long. Course she wasn't going to use them so she sent us back again. We made about five trips until we got to where we thought she might use it. So we got big clubs. We had to keep them about five more trips. When we got down to the size she was going to use we never tried it again. She used it and we knew it. [Laughs] Yes sir. And we'd each try and do something to get the other one to get the lickin you know. Boy I got a lot of them! I've had as many as three a day and there wasn't any too many, I'm telling you. No, I deserved every one I got, but it was always on a behind or where it wouldn't hurt you. You'd sting like heck, but do no damage. I know my worst fight I ever heard my mother and father go, my father had slapped me on the side of the head. Oh boy, no sir, we had a place to spank. That's the place. No hitting on the head at all. Boy they went (--) She took him down a notch I'm telling you. He never did it again. No.

Well and I say children should be spanked. Yup, they should. I spanked both of my, all three of my grandchildren when they was little tots. I'd spank their little behinders. Yup, they didn't like it. And a neighbor, one of our neighbors one time we was taking care of their little boy, he was just about a year old, at the age when they want to bite. Well he bit me on the cheek. So I bit him on the cheek. And I left teeth marks too. Cry, oh! Put him up to bed, he went to sleep. He got up. I picked him up and I brought him downstairs. He went like he was going to bite me and I held out my cheek. He looked at me, "me don't bite you." No, no sir. That was a good lesson. We told his folks. He said he never bit after that. You know? But I didn't hurt him. He'd, well it hurt of course, but it didn't injury him. No, I don't believe in abusing them. I worked in the Green Thumb down here at the schools after I retired. And there was one boy, must have been about ten, ten or eleven. He was pretty good size for his age. He was always picking on this other little kid. And I called him, twice I told him to stop. The third time I says, "look, you either stop or I'm going to blister your hind end till you can't sit down." He looked at me and says, "you can't, don't touch, dare touch me." That's a fact. I says, "that's what you think. I says, if I blister your hind then, if you don't stop I'll blister you, then we'll find out what's going to happen, but you're going to get it." You know, he quieted right down. And he become a good friend of mine. Yeah. They like discipline. Kids do like a certain amount of discipline. But I would have, I would have blistered him. I'd been probably up in court and sued and everything, maybe gone to jail, but (--) Even a parent isn't allowed to spank the kids now. You know that? In Massachusetts parents can't spank their kids. I'd spank them, you bet your life I would. [Chuckles]

T: Okay.

END OF TAPE